



Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey

Australian Statistician announcement of results

ABS House media conference 15 November 2017

My name is David Kalisch and I am the Australian Statistician.

I would like to welcome everyone to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, paying my respects to elders past and present.

I called this media conference to announce the results of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey – it's probably the only time millions of Australians will gather to hear from the Australian Statistician.

As the nation's official statistical agency, the ABS provides trusted, relevant, objective statistics to inform Australia's important decisions.

ABS statistics provide quality information about our society, our population, the economy and the environment.

On August 9 2017, the Treasurer directed the ABS to:

- Ask everyone on the electoral roll if they wish to express a view on the issue on whether the law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry

- The ABS was required to provide results for the nation as a whole, at the state and territory level, and for every Commonwealth Electoral Division.

The Treasurer's Direction required the results by today, which the ABS has achieved.

The ABS worked to enable as many eligible people as possible to participate in the voluntary survey. Together with our government partners and a number of suppliers, our goal was to make the process as easy as possible without compromising the integrity of the process or the results.

The survey was simple and could be completed by those travelling or living overseas, those in remote communities, people with disability, and those who speak different languages. Only one response per eligible Australian was counted.

Today, along with the results, we also provide a statement on quality and integrity of the survey. Australians can have trust in these statistics.

So now to the final count of participation - Millions of Australians responded to this voluntary survey – and the final number was 12 million, 727 thousand, and 920 people.

Overall, this survey achieved a response rate of 79.5 per cent. This is outstanding for a voluntary survey and well above other voluntary exercises conducted around the world.

It shows how important this issue is to many Australians.

Participation was strong across all ages, with all age groups having higher than 70% participation. Participation in the survey was slightly higher at older ages and slightly lower for younger age groups, but not markedly so. It's worth noting our youngest on the electoral role – the 18 and 19 year olds – responded strongly with around 78 per cent participating.

Participation was between 77.9 per cent and 82.4 per cent in every state and territory, except the Northern Territory where 58.4 per cent of those eligible chose to have a say.

Participation in the survey was over 70 per cent in 146 of the 150 Commonwealth electorate divisions. For the remaining four electorates, it was over 60 per cent for three and over 50 per cent for the remaining one.

With this high and consistent participation rate across ages, states and territories and Commonwealth electorates, Australians can have confidence these statistics reflect the view of the eligible population.

And now – the official results of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey.

1. For the national result:

- **Yes responses** – 7 million, 817 thousand and 247, representing **61.6** per cent of clear responses. That's 61.6 per cent of clear responses were yes.
- **No responses** – 4 million, 873 thousand and 987 representing **38.4** per cent of clear responses. That's 38.4 per cent of clear responses were no.
- A further 36,686 responses were unclear, representing **0.2** per cent of total responses

2. At a state and territory level:

Every State and Territory recorded a majority yes result.

Every state and territory recorded a majority **yes** result over 60 per cent, with the exception of NSW which recorded a majority **yes** result of 57.8 per cent. ACT had the highest majority **yes**, at 74 per cent.

3. By Commonwealth Electoral Division:

Of the 150 Commonwealth Electorates, a majority **yes** outcome was recorded for 133 electorates and a majority **no** outcome was recorded for only 17 electorates.

Results were clearly in favour of yes or no in every Commonwealth Electoral Division.

Within those 133 Electorates with a majority **yes** response, there were 95 Electorates with a majority **yes** response of at least 60 per cent.

Within those 17 Electorates with a majority **no** response, there were 6 Electorates with a majority **no** response of at least 60 per cent.

Five Electorates had a closer result, within the 49/51 range: three had a marginal **no** outcome and two of these had a marginal **yes** outcome.

The full results will shortly be made available on the dedicated Marriage Law Postal Survey website (marriagesurvey.abs.gov.au) and via the ABS website.

It gives me great pleasure to return these results back to the community today. Ultimately, the strong participation by the Australian public and their clear responses to the survey has delivered this quality information for the community.

I thank everyone who followed the instructions, and nearly everyone did – as this helped us process the forms quickly and accurately.

The ABS has been prudent with taxpayer funds. While the costs are still being tallied, I am confident the final cost for the survey will be under \$100 million, many millions of dollars less than the available budget.

In closing, I thank the ABS staff who worked long hours with terrific energy to deliver this survey through a Taskforce led by Deputy Australian Statistician Jonathan Palmer.

This has been a superb team effort, drawing expert and dedicated staff from across the ABS.

I acknowledge and thank the large number of agencies across Government and the private sector, including the Australian Electoral Commission, Department of Human Services and Australia Post, that assisted the ABS to undertake this survey.

I also recognise our entire ABS team who continued to deliver the many official statistics continuously expected from the ABS during these past 99 days – these included the latest economic statistics, population numbers, a further release of quality data from the 2016 Census, and more.

Later this morning, the ABS will release the latest wage growth estimates, tomorrow it's the monthly labour force estimates for October, and Friday we release overseas arrivals and departures statistics that are a key input for our population estimates.

While the Government directed the ABS to undertake this survey, they also assisted us to conduct it in a timely manner, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Minister Cormann, his office and Department.

Finally, a bouquet for the media, who gave the ABS frequent access to communicate to the public and helped increase community awareness of the survey process.

Thank you.

That brings a close to this morning's announcement. Thank you for your attention and interest.

Jonathan Palmer, Deputy Australian Statistician and Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey Lead, and I are available to take questions on the results and the process.